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North Stonington invests American Rescue Plan funds in community services

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Melina Khan, Special to The Day

North Stonington — The Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center, Ledge Light Health District and North Stonington Volunteer Fire Company are among the beneficiaries of the first allocation of the town's American Rescue Plan funds.

The finance and selectmen boards agreed last week to distribute roughly \$220,000 of the more than \$768,000 the town is receiving from the rescue plan this year. The second half of the town's \$1.5 million in relief will be received in June 2022.

The largest allocation — \$165,000 — will be given to the town's volunteer fire company to hire additional per diem staff over a three-year period.

Due to its volunteer nature, the fire company has at times struggled to recruit daytime staff, as many of its members have other full-time jobs. Funding a per diem, paid staff position allows the company to have guaranteed staffing in the event of severe weather or special events, Chief Charles Steinhart said at a Board of Selectmen meeting last month.

The NSVFC funding will need to be approved at a town meeting due to its size. First Selectman Mike Urgo said he will be looking to call that town meeting with the Board of Selectmen next week for sometime in August.

The remaining four allocations will not be required to receive approval at a town meeting because they are each less than \$20,000. This includes \$15,000 each to Ledge Light Health District and the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center.

Ledge Light has contributed significant efforts in North Stonington throughout the coronavirus pandemic, including holding vaccination clinics and testing sites in town. The ARP funds will help the health district continue efforts to support the town through COVID-19.

As North Stonington is a town with no social services, the Pawcatuck Neighborhood Center fulfills a need. PNC caters to the communities of Mystic, Pawcatuck, Stonington, North Stonington and Westerly to aid residents facing financial hardship. Most recently, the center has had a presence at Town Hall once a week to help residents needing social service assistance, and the allocation will allow PNC to continue those services.

The town also will invest \$15,000 of the ARP funds into a municipal notification system that will be used for reverse messaging to residents via text messages, emails and phone calls. The town's current notification system is used only for imminent emergencies.

"COVID-19 exposed a deficiency in communication for nonemergency, day-to-day communication," Urgo last week told the Board of Finance, which expressed support for the initiative.

The specific types of messages that will be distributed with the system is not yet clear, but a policy around the appropriate uses will likely be put in place, Urgo said. He added that he could see it being used for things like road closures or town meeting reminders.

Lastly, \$10,093 is being given to the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments to implement a coordinator position to assist member towns in distributing their ARP funds. Each of SCCOG's member towns has been asked to contribute 1% of the total countywide ARP funds to support this position for a four-year period.

As for what to do with the rest of the funds the town received this year, the Board of Selectmen will continue discussions at its upcoming meetings.

"The goal of this money is to get it into the hands of people who need it," Urgo said.

STORIES THAT MAY INTEREST YOU



In The Times: Contributors take time to celebrate (/local-news/20210929/in-times-contributors-take-time-to-celebrate)

A week and a half ago, I invited all Times columnists, freelancers and contributors to a little party at the house that Libby Friedman and I share in Waterford. Amazingly, most of these unassuming community leaders showed up on a beautiful September day to drink a glass of wine, sip on some soda...



Butterflies flit in the Harkness gardens (/local-news/20210928/butterflies-flit-in-harkness-gardens)

A monarch butterfly takes off from a flower in the picking garden Tuesday at Harkness Memorial State Park in Waterford.



Land trust looking for town to close on \$1.65 million deal (/local-news/20210928/land-trust-looking-for-town-to-close-on-165-million-deal)

The purchase would preserve more than 120 acres off Hathaway Road, including roughly 3,000 feet of waterfront on Pattagansett Lake and the Pattagansett River.

SEAT bus drivers call for better protections amid 'hostile situations' (/local-news/20210928/seat-bus-drivers-call-for-better-protections-amid-hostile-situations)

SEAT's union called on SEAT to "provide better protection and stronger workplace violence prevention measures to ensure the safety of transit workers and riders."